



PRIME PAYS

As Brompton's latest Junction stores open in London and Singapore, Chief Financial and Development Officer, **Lorne Vary**, explains how a 'one-trick pony' has bloomed into a global network of stand-alone stores...

Positioned within the hub of Westfield London, Brompton's recently assembled Junction store has been busy capitalising on the bustling footfall that comes with a prime retail pitch.

Turning up at the store, which opened a few months ago, it's obvious that thought and consideration has gone into every facet of its appearance; from carefully crafted wall displays to a centre stage workshop.

I don't have long to admire the aesthetics, though, as I'm almost immediately pushed back out of the store and onto a new Brompton Electric by Lorne Vary, Brompton's Chief Financial and Development Officer.

"You have to go out and give it a try," he enthuses. "Then you can get a proper feel for it. When it comes to test rides, I always ask customers to go for two."

As we wheel our Bromptons through the mall, down the escalator and out the entrance, all while dodging hurried shoppers and runaway pushchairs, I can't help thinking that this perhaps wasn't the most convenient of locations for a test ride. "It's a little difficult when you're inside a mall," Vary acknowledges. "But we're putting ourselves here to be in front of different people, and that is working extremely well. We want to transform cities. We're about promoting cycling and getting people moving, that's why we're in a real high-profile location here."

Brompton now has a total of 16 Junction stores located in key cycling cities across the globe, with branches opening in London, Singapore, Tel Aviv and Melbourne

over the last 12 months alone.

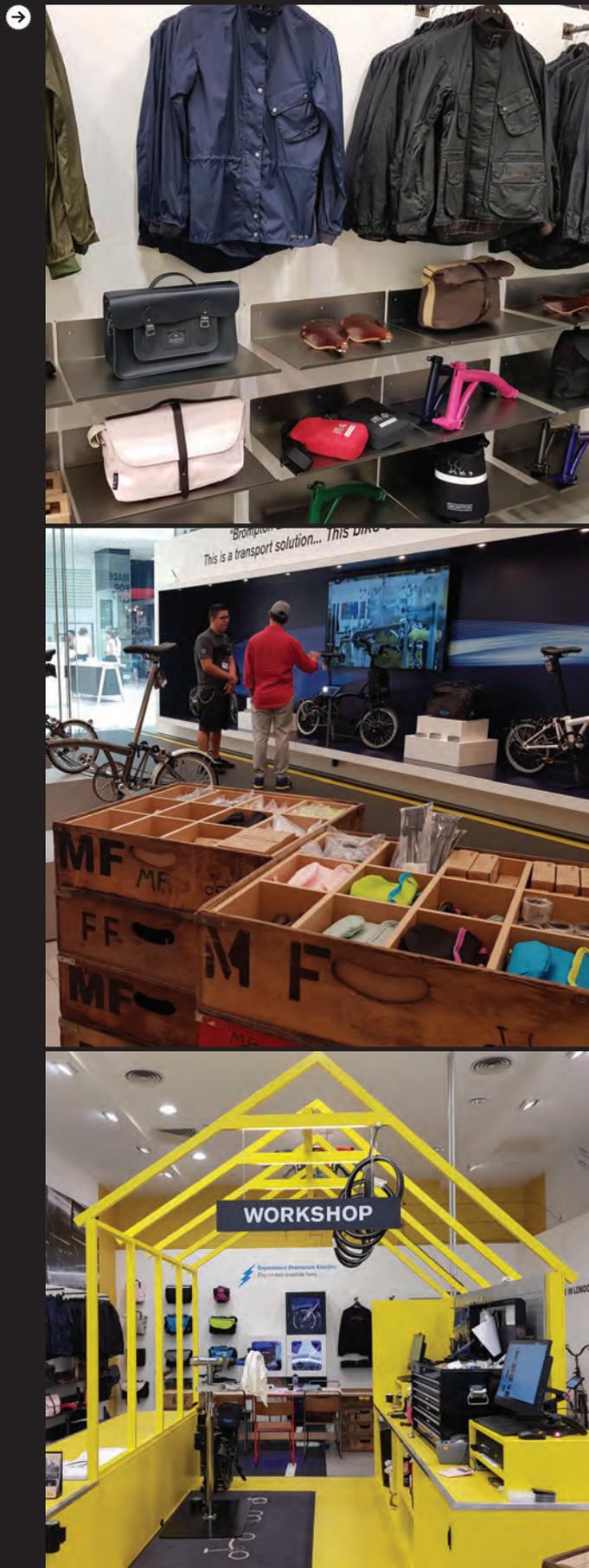
The concept behind this specific type of store is a simple one, Vary explains. "We were fixated on being a manufacturer, and we ended up so far away from the customer that we decided we needed to get closer. So, we started dabbling with the idea of having a stand-alone Brompton store."

Brompton opened its first London-based Junction store in Covent Garden six and a half years ago, a necessity due to the brand's 'Made in London' label, according to Vary. "The nervousness when we opened in Covent Garden was that it was Brompton taking back the market, that we didn't want dealers anymore and they would be side-lined. That certainly wasn't the case.

"Firstly, the prices are the same in a Junction store as they are in a dealer. But the main thing is, we're not here to cut the dealer out and profiteer, we're not here to cannibalise. It's about growing the market, and it made the local dealers up their game and their investment as brand awareness went up."

The Junction stores are far from just a place to sell bikes out of, and instead offer a completely new experiential retail environment for customers who may not be familiar with the brand, or who previously hadn't considered buying a Brompton.

"Bromptons, because of their compactness, were displayed by dealers shoving it in a corner, or underneath something else just gathering dust, so the idea behind the Brompton Junction was really the brand experience and



showcasing the bikes,” Vary explains. “Retail has changed, it’s evolved massively over the last five years. For us, we’re fortunate that our product is one you can interact with, you can fold it and unfold it, take it for a test ride and actually feel the product, that’s really important for us.”

A so-called ‘wall of bikes’ extends down almost the entire length of the Westfield store, displaying the full range of Brompton’s bicycles folded neatly into custom-made cubes. This design is not only an eye-catcher for passers-by but also demonstrates the extent of the brand’s product portfolio, as well as the bikes’ folding element, size and colourways.

Brompton has also placed its workshop in the centre of the store to create a sense of theatre and intrigue, while emphasising the handmade element the brand is known for. This approach has been rolled out in the Westfield store and latest Junction addition in Singapore, which opened last month.

Accompanying the physical presence of the bicycle displays and workshop, Brompton has integrated a seamless ‘endless aisle’ element in order to integrate the physical store with its e-commerce channels. Digital screens promote whatever the latest model might be, demonstrating how customers can use the bike in real life situations as opposed to “poncey models flouncing around,” Vary jokes.

This feeds into Brompton’s experiential retail approach, where customers are guided amongst the products, workshop and digital elements on a journey as they pass through the store.

“We’re here to promote cycling, so our bike is front and centre, the trophy, the real hero element of the store,” explains Vary. “The digital element is helping customers relate to how they might use the bicycles, and the final bit is our Brompton community through which we want to promote what activities we’re doing or initiatives we’re running.

“Building that community, where people come along to our events and learn with other riders, is really important to us.”

According to Vary, Brompton’s staff are another essential ingredient in the success of the brand’s Junction stores. “The first thing I want a customer to see is the wall of bikes and the range,” he says. “The second thing I want them to see is the team, and the third thing is the workshop. Customers want to see a team that is energetic, smiley and that want to engage.

“One of the biggest ‘do nots’ that I hammer into the team is assuming there is a right or wrong model. How I use a Brompton is very different to you. We want our team to listen to the customer, find out their interests, how they commute or how they are going to use the bike. The more you learn about the customer, the more you can guide them on which bike might be the most appropriate for them.”

It is also part of Brompton’s recruitment policy to encourage more women mechanics and salespeople in its stores, in a bid to appeal more widely to female customers who may be put off visiting a traditional, male-orientated bike shop.

According to Vary, it's bringing all these aspects together which creates that immersive experience the Junction stores strive for. "As much as retail is changing, retailers have to get smarter and adapt. Retail is not dead, it's just evolving in different ways. You have to offer that experience and create that 'wow', and that's what we're trying to do.

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"There is such a shift towards e-commerce now, so you need to give customers a completely different experience instore. This is all about us being the guinea pig and not being afraid to try different things."

After opening four Junction stores in the space of a year, Vary believes consolidation is on the cards for Brompton for the time being: "We've had a crazy period, so now we need to take a step back, reflect, and look at all the good things we've done at Westfield, and Singapore, and roll them out across some of the existing stores.

"We need to take some of the learnings we've made over the last 12 months and push them back into the system before we go on to the next one."

After that, it looks like San Francisco will be the next city in Brompton's line of sight. For now, though, getting the consistency right across the brand's network of stores is the key aim.

Brompton's Westfield store is agreed on a 12-month lease, and it's still a little early to tell how successful it has been in generating the brand awareness Brompton is encouraging. However, Vary is confident the brand is taking the right approach.

"We've got the balls and the entrepreneurialism to try different things. Everyone thought it was crazy to open a shop in the middle of a mall where you can't do test rides, but it's performing fantastically well, and we have a lot of happy customers.

"Those dealers that want to invest with us and up their game with better displays, POS and taking those learnings from our stores, they do fantastically well." ●



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